

EXPOSITION OF JUDGES

Message #11

Judges 8:1-21

I can guarantee every one of us this point - **when we are right where God wants us to be and when we are doing exactly what God wants us to do, there will be hassles.**

Wouldn't it be wonderful if everything ran smoothly all of the time? Wouldn't it be great if you could develop for God and serve the Lord and be happy and never hit any bump in the road? Such an existence in this world is impossible if for no other reason than Satan will fight you every step of the way. Satan wants God's work stifled and he will do whatever he can to do that.

There is an interesting story in the book of Acts. The Apostle Paul receives a direct vision from God to go to Macedonia to preach the Gospel (Acts 16:9-10). So Paul immediately obeys and heads for Macedonia. When he arrives he heads to Philippi and within a short time he gets hauled into court, beat up and thrown in jail (Acts 16:19-24). Here was Paul doing exactly what God wanted him to do and he finds himself in a literal bind.

Judges 7 was a wonderful epoch time of blessing for Israel. It was a time that was thrilling. Israel was once again in tune with God and God was doing great things with her and for her. Gideon had taken 300 men to war against the Midianites and they saw God do the miraculous and the impossible. Things were exciting for Israel and finally things were moving in the right direction. But it didn't take long until the negative junk began to happen. It didn't take long for Satan to begin some counterattack to try to discourage, stifle and stop the blessings of God.

WHEN YOU ARE DOING GOD'S WILL AND FIGHTING A GOOD WARFARE, YOU WILL SOON DISCOVER THAT YOU WILL RUN INTO NEGATIVE OPPOSITION AND OBSTACLES.

When you are right where God wants you to be doing what God wants you to do, there will be moments when you will be hassled. It is no coincidence that the Christian life is described as warfare and that we are called to be good soldiers in the warfare.

HASSLE #1 – The hassle of people who complain and criticize. **8:1-3**

Things were great for Israel and the first thing that happens is Gideon runs into a whining and complaining group of men from Ephraim. They start accusing Gideon of ignoring them because he didn't take the time to call them when he went to fight the Midianites. Gideon has just done something that hadn't been done in years and he runs into a buzz saw of harsh criticism. They were upset that Gideon dared do something for God without them.

At this time in history Ephraim was an exalted tribe in Israel. Joshua had been of the tribe of Ephraim and the Tabernacle was located in their city Shiloh. They had been one of the tribes who was exalted by Deborah as one that fought the Canaanites (Judges 5:13-14). Ephraim was the largest tribe and a very important tribe. They were proud, they were jealous and they were mad.

At surface level this appears to be a legitimate complaint, but there are two things that are somewhat odd about this. **First**, Ephraim didn't raise a finger to try and attack Midian until Gideon summoned them (7:24) and **second**, there is no place where they say they would have even come had they been asked.

They are simply jealous because word is spreading about a great victory in Israel and they aren't mentioned. They are not thankful, they are not joyful, and they are not enthused or spiritually excited. They were bitter. Leon Wood said "An outbreak of jealousy regularly hinders the work of God" (*Distressing Days of Judges*, p. 221).

This is kind of what Ephraim does. They are complaining that they weren't called or asked by Gideon to go to the main battle against the Midianites.

Gideon could have been angry. He could have unleashed a barrage of negative words and would have been legitimate in doing so. But instead he gave a gracious answer to them that calmed them down. Gideon knew that God's work in progress was more important than him losing his temper. Truth is one who is slow to anger is wise according to the Word of God.

Ephraim did appear to want to help him, so he wasn't about to blame them for that. He said, "What did I do in comparison with what you did?" You mopped things up. All I did was take 300 men and watch God destroy the Midianites; but you tracked down and killed two key leaders of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb. That answer appeased them. Just like Proverbs says, "A gentle answer turns away wrath" (Proverbs 15:1).

Sometimes the bitterest, sour-faced, unthankful, negative, non-joyful people are fellow believers who are jealous of others within the body. Years ago someone came to me and asked why I never asked a particular person to sing a solo in the church. My answer was the person truly loves the Lord, but does not really have a solo voice. The person would be better in a choir. I felt that was a better answer than saying because the person can't sing. I will never be able to figure this out, but some people who cannot sing want to stand up and sing a solo. It is almost like when they hear someone else do it they are jealous and think they can do it. Instead of using the gifts and abilities God has truly given them, they want more of the limelight. That is what Ephraim did here.

HASSLE #2 – The hassle of people who won't support the work being done for God. **8:4-9**

We may recall that Gideon asked God for two fleece signs. On two occasions in this military campaign, God will demand two faith demonstrations. The first was when God cut the military numbers two times in chapter seven, and the second is right here when God's people reject him two times in chapter eight.

Gideon apparently calmed things down with Ephraim and he and his 300 took off to pursue the 15,000 Midianites who got away. According to Dr. Leon Wood, he and his men would have to travel about 150 miles through tough country just to catch the Midianites (*Ibid.*, p. 222).

After traveling about 80-85 miles they came to Succoth, a city on the east side of the Jordan in the tribe of Gad. They were in pursuit of the Midianites and Gideon and his men were tired, exhausted, and hungry. The work of God can be fatiguing at times.

Often times when doing God's work and will, you do get weary and tired and a little encouragement can really help you out.

These 300 men had just liberated Israel from the Midianites and you would think everyone in the nation would want to rally around Gideon and support them. These men are heroes for what they have done. **Truth is the tribe of Gad had done nothing in the warfare in Deborah's day or in Gideon's day.** Here Gideon and his men are risking their lives for Israel and Gad has not contributed anything.

When he came to Succoth he needed supplies and all he did was ask the people for some bread. Observe carefully from **verse 5** that Gideon wants the bread for his men, not himself. Don't forget that bread was scarce because the Midianites came in annually and raided the land and took the best bread. So there is no question this would require a sacrifice from the people of Succoth.

He told the leaders of Succoth that he was pursuing two other key kings of Midian; Zebah and Zalmunna. Apparently the people of Succoth knew and feared these two Midianite kings. Instead of them supporting Gideon and giving bread to his troops, they unanimously said well you don't have the kings in hand yet so we are not going to give you any bread **(8:6)**. **We will not support you in any way.** They would not contribute even a meal to their brothers.

One commentator observed carnal men think things they can't do or won't do are impossible for others to do (George Bush, *Judges*, p. 110). **Often times people who are not really doing anything for God, don't support and discourage those who are doing great things for God.** Gideon did not ask them to go fight the battle, he asked for some support of bread. We should joyfully and willingly support those who are truly on the front lines of battle. Not everyone is called to the front lines, but in some way we can support those who are. The people of Succoth would not help Gideon.

Gideon did not give them a soft answer like he did Ephraim; he said "okay, when I finally have overtaken these kings, I will come back here and thrash you all. I'll take thorns from the wilderness and briers, and we will give you a good disciplinary thrashing. I'll mangle your flesh" **(8:7)**.

Gideon then traveled up in elevation another seven-ten miles and came to another city in Gad, Penuel and asked if his men could have something to eat, and they said the same thing the people of Succoth said **(8:8)**. So Gideon said "fine, when I finally have overtaken those kings I'll come back here and tear down your tower" in which you put so much of your faith **(8:9)**. Apparently their tower became a source of false security and Gideon said I'll tear it down to the ground.

Gideon is becoming a transformed man by the power of God. At one time he was very timid but now he is on the front lines of the warfare, and he will not back down from anyone.

This lack of support would have been enough to discourage anyone. No one wants to support you and you are doing a real work for God. But it didn't stop Gideon or his 300 men. They kept after the enemy and would not allow their mission for God to be sidetracked by the detractors. I don't know exactly how Gideon got food for his men. It is speculated that perhaps some other city gave them food, but regardless they kept going. This group wouldn't quit.

They were focused on getting a job done for God and they would not be sidetracked from that job. **Gideon's main source of discouragement was not the enemy; it was those who were supposed to be his family and friends.** I don't know if this has ever happened to you, but it has to me and it hurts. You are trying to do a work for God and you discover that the people you thought you could depend on for help won't help. It is really a big let down when you are being faithful to God, and you are not getting any support from your family or friends. You stay faithful anyway. You keep at it. God will honor you.

It is deadly serious business in the sight of God to not cooperate and to refuse to help the work of God when it is truly going forth with full force when one has the means to do so. God takes special note of this.

Let me take a moment to thank you for your support of this work and ministry. There is no question that we are on the front lines of warfare in proclaiming God's Word. Many have encouraged us and supported us through prayer, through giving and through words and notes of encouragement. This means a great deal to God and to this ministry.

God obviously keeps track of who supports His work and who doesn't.

HASSLE #3 – The actual warfare fight and victory with the real enemy. **8:10-12**

Finally Gideon gets to the warfare he actually wanted to fight. The job that Gideon wanted to do all along was this job right here. He had a goal of tracking down the remaining Midianites and destroying them. In order to do that he had to work his way through a bunch of spiritual deadbeats.

Often the road to victory is a road filled with setbacks. If it truly is God's will, probably some close to you will try to discourage you and stop it. Never stop in obeying God even when you are not being supported by those who should support you, because you will see God give you some amazing victories and blessings. D.L. Moody once said "give me a man who says this one thing I will do rather than fifty who say this is what I will dabble in."

After surviving these setbacks of criticism and rejection, Gideon and his men came to Karkor, which is where Zebah and Zalmunna and their 15,000 men were located. Karkor was located about fifteen miles SE of Penuel. They had set up their tents and thought they were secure. Bush says they were "tent dwelling Arabs" (*Ibid.*, p. 111). Gideon came and took them by surprise in their tent city and routed the entire group (**8:12**). The two kings took flight and Gideon went right after them and captured them.

HASSLE #4 – The hassle of having to discipline non-supporting people. **8:13-17**

Gideon took the two kings and headed back to Succoth to show them he had been victorious. He apparently travels a different route identified as "by the ascent of Heres," because he will go to Succoth first and then down to Penuel.

On the way he captured a young man from the city, and he had him give him the names in writing of the leaders of Succoth, which turned out to be seventy-seven in all (**8:14**).

Now you must believe that this was no coincidence that God let Gideon run across this young man or get this information. As Dr. Warren Wiersbe said, this is providential (*Be Available*, p. 89). God was sovereignly in every bit of this.

Gideon went into the city and showed the two kings to the men and reminded them that they would not support him and give him any food. Then he took all seventy-seven leaders and whipped them good (**8:16**).

Then Gideon went up the road to Penuel and did something even worse; he tore down the tower and he killed the men who wouldn't help him (**8:17**). Gideon was no longer some meek and mild leader, he was bold and confident and he was a disciplinarian. If any work is to move forward for God it needs discipline.

There are three key lessons to learn here:

- 1) When God has given us a job to do, we must finish it even when we are discouraged.
- 2) We must make certain that we do not discourage any who are doing a powerful work for God.
- 3) God keeps the record of those who strengthen His work and who discourage His work. Things long forgotten by men are never forgotten by God.

HASSLE #5 – The hassle of having to take care of things yourself. **8:18-21**

There is a principle that shows up often in the work of God; if you want the job done right you must do it yourself.

Gideon finally arrives back home to Ophrah and there he quizzes the two kings about killing God's people at Tabor (**8:18**). Apparently there was some well known public execution that had taken place at Tabor in the previous seven years of Midianite raids, and Gideon is asking them about it. He asked what kind of men they killed and the two responded they looked like Gideon in that they looked like some son of a king (**8:18**). What these two enemy kings didn't know is that the men they killed were Gideon's brothers (**8:19**).

During this time when someone committed a homicide they paid for it with their life, and each family was required to carry out the punishment (Numbers 35:9-34). It is not like in our culture where a Casey Anthony goes free because you have a brain-dead jury. Our judicial system is a joke. It is not after justice and truth. Even the selection of jurors is a big game.

Gideon was the patriarchal judge and jury and Gideon invited his first born son Jether to kill these two murderous Midianite kings (**8:20**). But Jether was young and timid and didn't draw his sword, so Gideon had one more hassle, he had to do this himself (**8:21**). You cannot expect a child to do a man's job.

It is not an easy road to do a great work for God in this world. It is a road filled with discouragements, set backs, criticism, and lack of support. But you keep at it, you stay focused and God will use you to accomplish His will.